

Spacing magazine

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Come and Go

Mending wall

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The AGO isn't the only building undergoing massive change. Beginning this fall, the 27-acre Centre for Addiction and Mental Health will be redeveloped; existing buildings will be torn down and replaced, parks will be created, streets—including Ossington Avenue and Fennings, Brookfield, and Givens streets will extend through the site and down to King, among other changes.

“We're trying to integrate the CAMH with the community,” says Joanne Campbell, vice-president of communications and community relations at CAMH. “The current site was built like St. Jamestown and Regent Park: isolated buildings plunked down in garden-like settings. But the reality is, without street addresses—by isolating the community from the site—you're left with dead space.”

The first phase—the project is expected to take 12 years—will see four new buildings along the western parameter, a public park, and a restored western wall—all designed around the existing old-growth trees. “The redevelopment began with an assessment of the old-growth trees,” says Campbell. “We conceptualized the entire plan around these trees, including extending the existing Shaw Street Park as well as two other on-site parks, which we're dedicating to the city.”

The original asylum—referring to a time when we called it an asylum and clients were patients or, worse, inmates—was torn down in 1975, a year before the Ontario Heritage Act was passed, and now the tall, brick walls are all that remain. The walls are protected under the Act and will be restored. The eastern portion, along Shaw Street, will be recessed in spots and turned into an outdoor public art gallery, all with the paid assistance of current clients.

In 2003, the CAMH and the City of Toronto had an open-ideas competition to see what to do with the walls. “Some people think the walls symbolize an outdated view of mental illness, but that's not the view of most people and certainly not the clients,” says Campbell.

“The history of mental illness has its highs and lows, which we’re not afraid to acknowledge. The walls are part of our collective history and should be protected, not just thrown away.”